

New studies in indigenous languages

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The *Journal of Anthropological Research* has just published a new article on the development of linguistic documentation among heritage language speakers: "Articulating Lingual Life Histories and Language Ideological Assemblages: Indigenous Activists within the North Fork Mono and

Village of Tewa Communities."

Specifically, it focuses on the biographical information of individual speakers, and the significance they place on the [language](#) in question. Author Paul V. Kroskrity focused his research on two specific communities—the North Fork Rancheria of Mono Indians in California and the Village of Tewa, First Mesa, Hopi Reservation in northeastern Arizona—and in both cases used specific elders with unique qualifications in [heritage](#) language. The ultimate goal was to further identify a link between simply using a heritage language (such as speaking it regularly) and promoting its documentation and continued use in future generations.

The elders in question were Rosalie Bethel, who spoke Western Mono, and Dewey Healing, who represented the Village of Tewa who speak a minority language on the Hopi Reservation. In both cases, the subjects possessed unique qualities that rendered their cases particularly insightful. Bethel was the product of a mixed-language household (her mother was Mono, her father a German immigrant) whose parents thrived despite their language differences. Early trauma in institutionalized educational facilities led her to the Western Mono language as a means of healing and connecting to her heritage. She made it central to her identity, and participated in the Taitaduhaan (CD-ROM) Project: performing and recording stories, songs, and prayers in Western Mono.

"Her participation..." Kroskrity says, "[was] offered as teaching examples for a language community lacking in fluent elders." It made her a paragon among the Western Mono community.

In Healing's case, he grew up central to his [culture](#) (as opposed to Bethel, whose upbringing was suspended between white and [native cultures](#)) and embraced multilingualism while modernizing his culture. In so doing, he

used the benefits of integration as a means of preserving the language and traditions of the Tewa people. He focused on ceremonial life, particularly the performance of tribal dances, and he was also extremely active in Hopi political life. Like Bethel, he recorded songs, poetry, and other examples of Tewa language, which included new original works as well as traditional older ones.

In both cases, the subjects used their heritage language not only to help retain the traditions of their people, but revitalize them and give them more of a modern role in their respective communities. Literacy in the Tewa and Hopi languages is on the rise and the communities recognize the need for language revitalization as a means of maintaining the culture as it moves forward.

Their work illustrates what the article refers to as the personal "meanings of language use that individuals draw on as they selectively reproduce and influence their social worlds through their own emergent linguistic activity." By better understanding their [personal experiences](#), and how they apply to lives as they as they are lived, it can illuminate the push and pull between minority cultures and more dominant ones, as well as the ways that individuals reject, resist and adapt their use of heritage languages within indigenous communities. "Lingual life histories clearly provide a means for relating the personal milieu of individuals to the language ideological assemblages in which they are enmeshed," Kroskirty writes. That, in turn, can provide increased insight into the maintenance and revitalization of those cultures: a road map to the future as well as illumination of the past.

More information: Paul V. Kroskirty, Articulating Lingual Life Histories and Language Ideological Assemblages: Indigenous Activists within the North Fork Mono and Village of Tewa Communities, *Journal of Anthropological Research* (2021). [DOI: 10.1086/712263](https://doi.org/10.1086/712263)

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